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PROTECTED AREAS IN ALBERTA'S MOUNTAIN FORESTS

INTRODUCTION

From sub-alpine meadow to fertile parkland, the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains includes an astonishing array of landscape patterns.Mountains, forests, foothills, meadows, rivers, lakes and parkland together make up a uniquely diverse area of Alberta stretching from the Willmore Wilderness Park southward to the U.S. border. Covering some 20,521 square miles, these gifts of nature provide aesthetic, environmental and economic benefits for all Albertans.

MOUNTAIN FORESTS

The vast mountain forests of the Eastern Slopes contribute to a unique Alberta heritage. Supplying habitat for wildlife, outstanding recreational opportunities and production of timber are all advantages achieved through multiple use management of our mountain forests.

These forests are also a critical source of water - over 85% of the water supply of the prairie provinces comes from the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains.

Production Forests

Alberta's forests are an important natural resource providing many opportunities. In managing the mountain forest protection of environmental values and production of resources are two distinct purposes.

Sound resource management of these forests will ensure a perpetual supply of benefits that include a clean water supply, enhanced wildlife habitat, increased recreational opportunities and a sustained timber supply.

Alberta's Mountain Forests

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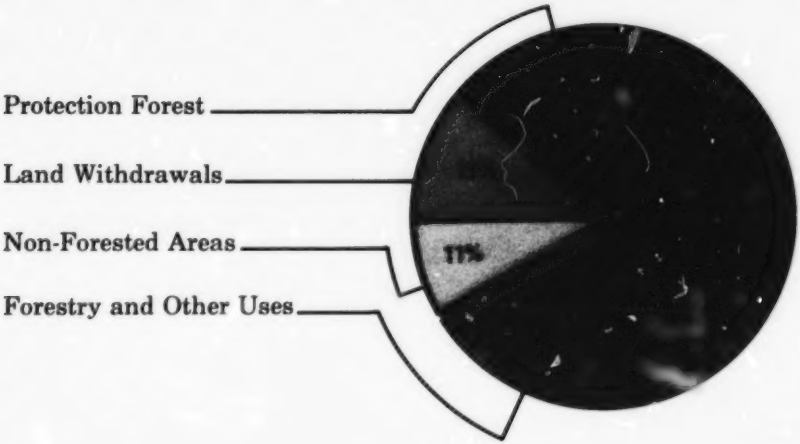
Mountain forests provide areas for multiple use including timber production and protection forests. Other lands are withdrawn from the timber land base and are not available for timber production.



PROTECTION FORESTS

Over 27% of the mountain forests are protected from resource development. The aim of management is to protect these areas for their sensitive environments, unique or representative ecosystems, critical wildlife habitats or for wildland recreation use. The areas are set aside to ensure conservation of their natural features, including selected old growth forest stands.

There are six categories of protected forests, in addition to prime protection areas, found along Alberta's foothills.

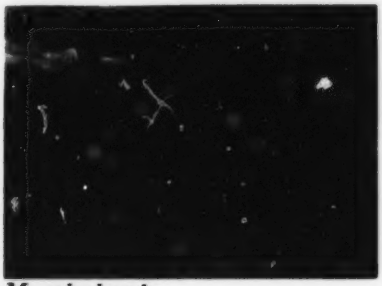
Ecological Reserves

Alberta's ecological reserves are part of an international program to preserve representative and special natural ecosystems. Legislation sets aside areas that illustrate aspects of Alberta's environmental diversity. The purpose of these sites is to maintain natural habitats and to provide areas for scientific research. Use of the area for other activities is restricted.

There are presently 31,231 acres under reservation as candidate ecological reserves.

Proposed ecological reserves containing representative examples of ecosystems are found throughout Alberta's forested lands. Kootenay Plains, west of Abraham Lake, is the finest example in Alberta of northern montane grasslands and is important elk wintering range. Marshybank, located south of Hinton, contains a representative diversity of the foothills forest types.

Plateau Mountain

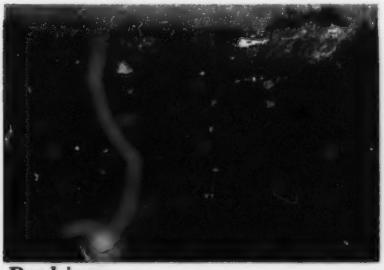


Marshybank

Areas are also proposed as ecological reserves primarily for their special features. Plateau Mountain is a large, relatively flat expanse of alpine with the best Alberta example of patterned ground, a geological feature caused by permafrost. It also includes important bighorn sheep wintering habitat.

Natural Areas

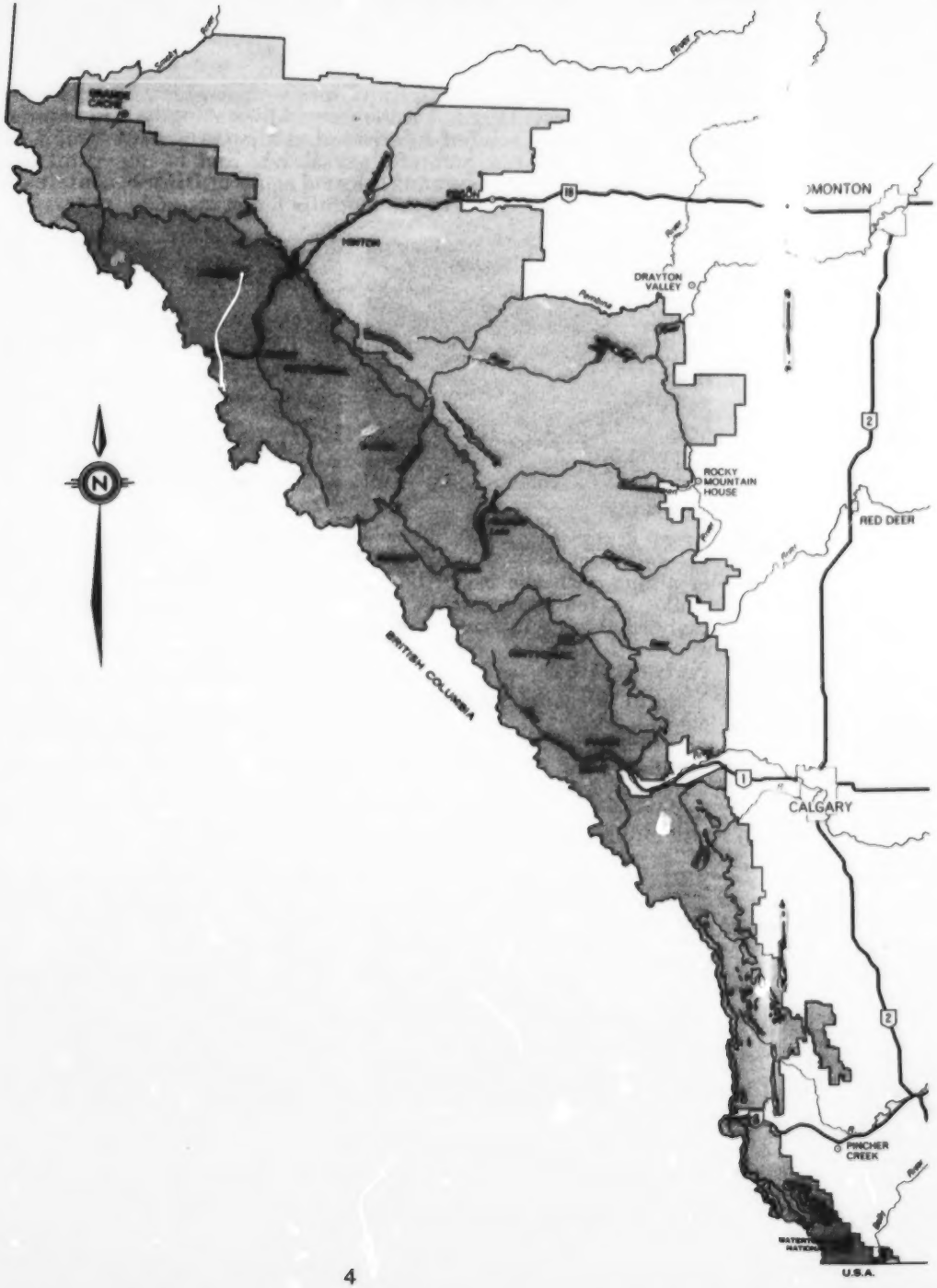
Natural Areas in Alberta are special parcels of public land. They contain natural features representing one or more aspects of the province's biological and physical diversity. These areas fall in the middle of the range of conservation lands in Alberta, between strictly protected lands, such as ecological reserves, and those lands intensively developed for recreation. Hunting and fishing are recreational activities that may be allowed in natural areas.



Beehive

Landslide Lake

There are numerous proposed, and established natural areas on forested lands. The establishment of Natural Areas ensures the continued availability of these opportunities for present and future generations to appreciate, study and enjoy nature.



PROTECTED AREAS IN ALBERTA'S MOUNTAIN FORESTS

Land Use Description

Protected Forest

Production Forest

The Beehive is a designated Natural Area covering 26 square miles and includes a significant area of undisturbed old spruce-fir forest. It is managed to conserve its features in a natural state for public appreciation and education, and for low-intensity recreation. The area offers high quality back-country experiences to the outdoor recreationist. Fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, cross country skiing and horseback riding are all a part of the recreation experience in the Beehive area.

Southcastle is a proposed Natural Area that contains a large number of rare and interesting plant communities. Landslide Lake, also a proposed Natural Area, includes a scenic lake formed by a rock slide blocking the valley drainage. It is a popular hiking and fishing area.

Wilderness Areas

Established in the 1960's, wilderness areas protect the unspoiled beauty of Alberta's mountains, valleys, and streams. These areas offer the challenge and solitude of an undisturbed natural setting. The spectacular and fragile wildlife, fisheries and wildland resources in wilderness areas are being preserved in their natural state for future generations.

Siffleur

White Goat

Backpacking and camping are the most common activities. Mountain climbing, nature photography, snowshoeing and cross country skiing are also enjoyed by visitors.

Alberta boasts three wilderness areas located in the Rocky Mountains. The Ghost River Wilderness Area covers approximately 59 square miles of rugged mountainous terrain and large glaciated valleys. The White Goat Wilderness Area encompassing 172 square miles includes hanging glaciers, mountain lakes and waterfalls. The Siffleur Wilderness Area is a mosaic of picturesque valleys, high peaks, mountain lakes, and alpine meadows extending over 159 square miles.

Willmore Wilderness Park

Willmore Wilderness Park, largest area of its kind in North America, was established in 1959 and is "dedicated to the use of the people of Alberta for their benefit, education and enjoyment". Willmore offers spectacular scenery, whether it be a view from one of the peaks on the Continental Divide or the alpine meadows alive with color. The numerous rivers and streams, the diversity of flora and fauna, the craggy mountain peaks and cliffs leave a lasting impression on all who view them.

Willmore Wilderness Park

Over 1,775 square miles in area, the Willmore provides outstanding opportunities for hiking, trail riding, cross country skiing and snowshoeing, while conserving sensitive wildland resources. Exceptional hunting and sportfishing opportunities are internationally recognized in Willmore Wilderness Park.

Through the management, conservation and protection of its natural resources and by preservation of its natural beauty, Willmore will be maintained for the enjoyment of future generations.

Kananaskis Country

Kananaskis Country's spectacular terrain ranges from rolling foothills and montane forests to the ice and rock of the high alpine. Each of these environments offer a wealth of recreational opportunities to be enjoyed year round.

Kananaskis Country

Covering 1,641 square miles, Kananaskis Country is a multiple use area which emphasizes recreation. As well as areas for timber harvesting, all terrain vehicle use, natural gas extraction and ranching operations, the area includes three provincial parks.

Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, located within Kananaskis Country, has facilities for vehicle camping, group camping, hotels, and cabin accommodation. Backpacking, skiing, snowshoeing, cycling, fishing, and boating are popular pursuits of visitors to the park.

Bow Valley Provincial Park is located along the front range of the Rocky Mountains. Camping opportunities, interpretive trails and good fishing are offered. The park is known for its variety of wild flowers.

Bragg Creek Provincial Park is in the foothills, along the Elbow River.It is a popular cross country skiing area with excellent fishing and hiking opportunities.

Bighorn Wildland Recreation Area

The Bighorn Wildland Recreation Area is a special area designated to accommodate public interest in outdoor recreation, while protecting sensitive wildlife, fisheries and wildland resources.

Bighorn

Bighorn

Covering 1,531 square miles, the Bighorn is Alberta's first wildland recreation area. It is a vast unique area managed to provide a wide range of wildland recreation activities. Hiking, trail riding, cross country skiing and snowshoeing can all be enjoyed in the spectacular Bighorn.

Hunting in this pristine wilderness area is internationally recognized because of thriving populations of trophy bighorn sheep, mountain goat and grizzly bear. Stream fishing potential is among the best in the province because of high quality water resources in the mountains and foothills.

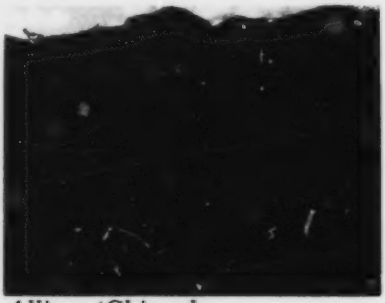
FOREST LAND USE ZONES

Forest land use zones are areas of land to which legislative controls are applied to solve specific land use problems. The rules and conditions for each zone are unique, which makes them quite different from special protection areas, such as ecological reserves or natural areas. This management tool helps to reduce the negative impacts of random recreation uses on the environment and on each other. They are not exclusive to the protection forest.

Currently there are ten forest land use zones in Alberta that cover 2,178 square miles of public land in the Eastern Slopes.

Allison/Chinook is an example of a forest land use zone used to control conflicting recreation activities. This area has traditionally been used year-round for a number of recreational activities including skiing, horse use, hiking, hunting and snowmobiling. Conflicts between these various uses have occurred over the past few years, largely between cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. The Allison/Chinook Forest Land Use Zone was established to reduce these conflicts by separating motorized and non-motorized recreation activities.

Upper Clearwater



Allison/Chinook

The Upper Clearwater Forest Land Use Zone protects environmentally sensitive backcountry from the adverse effects of motorized vehicle activity and horse use. This area contains sensitive resources such as wildlife and their habitats, in addition to the sensitive nature of the watersheds that comprise 247 square miles in the central portion of the Eastern Slopes.

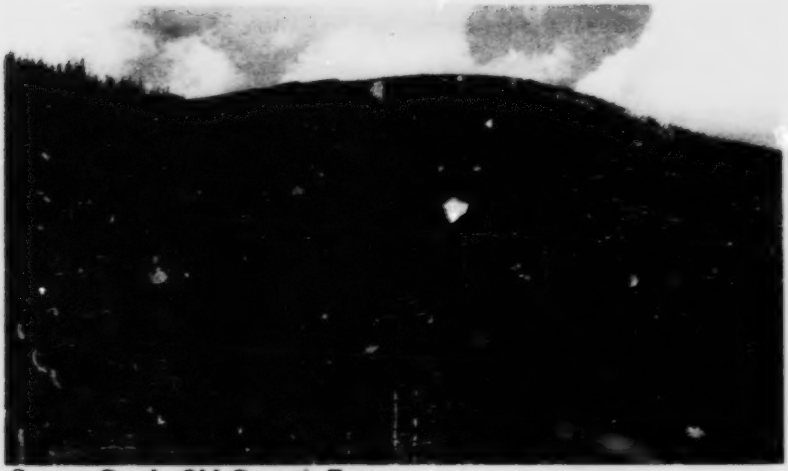
OLD GROWTH: CLIMAX FORESTS

Old growth or climax forests of spruce and fir comprise 21 percent of Alberta's mountain forests. These forests, covering 4,219 square miles, represent a special habitat.

As an ecosystem, old growth forests are an important component of our natural heritage. Spared from the natural processes which can affect Alberta's forests, these stands are often visually magnificent yet ecologically unstable. The trees lack vigour and crown growth. Their old age makes them particularly susceptible to natural elements, such as fire, insects, and disease.

Mountain Forests - The Future

Management of Alberta's mountain forests is a commitment to the future. Clearly, the importance of non-timber interests such as wildlife and recreation will continue to grow. Nonetheless, this does not reduce the need for sound forest management. It is becoming increasingly evident that management of the forest for watershed, recreation, wildlife, fisheries, as well as timber values requires the planned removal of some overmature forest.



Scarpe Creek, Old Growth Forest

Scarpe Creek is an example of old growth forest left in its natural state. Due to pressure from wilderness advocates, management was not applied to this area. Decimated by an insect infestation in the early 1980's, it exists today as a tract of forest land with limited use. It will remain that way for many years to come.

To preserve the health of forests requires a constant and comprehensive program of forest management - a program that is well underway today to meet the needs of tomorrow.